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FBI Chief Acts to Silence Internal Criticism

Sessions Orders Penalizing of Improper Disclosure of Data; Mortgage Inquiry Winds Up

By Sharon LaFraniere
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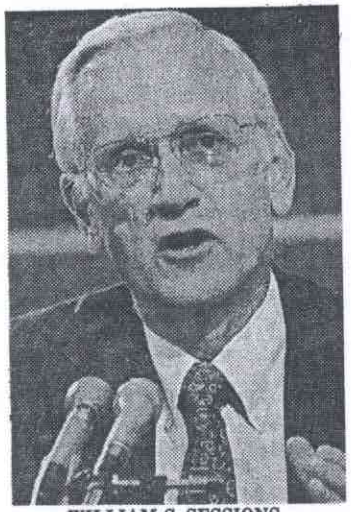
Fighting to keep his job, FBI Director William S. Sessions moved this past weekend to silence internal criticism of him while ethics investigators concluded an inquiry into whether he received a "sweetheart deal" on his home mortgage.

In a five-page memorandum delivered to FBI field offices Sunday, Sessions said recent news accounts have aired "family" debates that should be confidential. He instructed that disciplinary action be taken against anyone who improperly discloses information about bureau investigations—including ethics inquiries like his own.

"My commitment to leading the bureau through challenging and difficult times remains steadfast," said Sessions, who has mounted an aggressive campaign to serve the final five years of a 10-year appointment.

Meanwhile, the Justice Department's Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR) on Friday gave Acting Attorney General Stuart M. Gerson a report on Sessions's home mortgage from Riggs National Bank.

OPR had received allegations that Sessions and his wife received a "sweetheart deal" on the mortgage. But its investigation of the matter was delayed because Sessions would not release his mortgage documents.



WILLIAM S. SESSIONS
. . . campaigns strongly to keep his job

After Sessions finally gave investigators permission to examine the records, OPR still could not interview Riggs bank officials because that, too, would require a specific release from Sessions. It was unclear yesterday exactly what conclusions OPR drew. OPR is working with the FBI's ethics office.

White House officials have been waiting for OPR's findings on the mortgage before reviewing a blistering report from OPR last month accusing Sessions of a pattern of misconduct. OPR found that Sessions knowingly claimed an improper tax exemption and misused bureau resources—allegations Sessions vehemently denies.

How much if any sympathy Sessions can expect from the White House is unclear. On Sunday, Vice President Gore said Sessions deserves a full and fair review and suggested that he might be the victim of a political attack by former attorney general William P. Barr.

Sessions and his wife obtained a $375,000 home mortgage in August 1989 at a time when Sessions earned $89,500 a year. Nine mortgage lenders said in interviews it is highly unlikely they would have approved such a large loan on the basis of the couple's income.

Sessions's memorandum comes after a run of newspaper articles describing the growing division between him and his senior staff. In an interview Saturday night, Alice Sessions said a palace coup is underway on the seventh floor of the J. Edgar Hoover Building. But she said her husband's hands are tied because Barr forbade him from taking action against anyone who cooperated with OPR's inquiry.

Sessions was particularly angry last week to learn that Associate Deputy Director Weldon Kennedy had decided to postpone disciplinary decisions against employees who misuse FBI vehicles after agents complained that they were being held to a higher standard than Sessions holds himself. In his order, Sessions said "all existing bureau policies and procedures shall remain in full force and effect and shall not be altered, amended or revoked without an express written directive signed by the director."

Alice Sessions said her husband also was disturbed by published accounts of private meetings he held Friday, both with senior staff and an advisory group of five agents who head field offices.

The advisory group members had decided beforehand that they would tell Sessions he should resign if he solicited their advice, according to sources familiar with the meeting.

When he didn't ask, they only told him that his public fight against OPR's charges—especially his criticism of Deputy FBI Director Floyd I. Clarke—had damaged the bureau, sources said. They also told him he had suffered from the actions of his executive assistant, Sarah W. Munford, who was fired by the Justice Department last month for misconduct. Sessions, who publicly defended Munford as recently as two weeks ago, agreed, according to one source.

In his memo, Sessions said: "I regret making remarks which have been interpreted as public criticism of Mr. Clarke and senior FBI officials."